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SUBJECT: NUEVO LEON'S HEALTH SECRETARY BRIEFS ON H1N1 FLU

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¶1. Summary. On May 14, 2009 Monterrey Consul General, Econoff and ACS Deputy met with Nuevo Leon Secretary of Health Gilberto Montiel Amoroso to discuss the state's response to the H1N1 outbreak and its capacity to handle future pandemics. The capital of Nuevo Leon, Monterrey, is the third largest city in country and the industrial capital of northern Mexico. Situated only 150 miles from the U.S. border, the city is also regional headquarters for many U.S. based businesses. There have been 25 cases and one death of H1N1 flu reported in the state. Montiel credits the state's swift response for containing the outbreak and he believes the state is now better positioned to handle pandemics in the future. End Summary.

Timeline of State Actions to Prevent Contamination

¶2. Nuevo Leon's state government convened its State Committee on Health Security on April 24, the same day schools and public institutions were closed in Mexico City. The following day, the Governor, Jose Natividad Gonzalez Paras declared a state of alert and urged citizens to take precautions to prevent the spread of the flu. Two days after the school closures in Mexico City, the state formed an Emergency Committee for the Prevention and Treatment of Viral Epidemics. The committee closed all schools in the state from April 27 to May 6 and also began a public awareness campaign. On Wednesday April 29, checkpoints were established on the six major highways entering the state. Health officials also began visual inspections of passengers at airports and bus terminals. During the long May Day break, May 1 -5, the governor required that all nonessential government and private businesses shut down. On May 6, business and public institutions (except for schools) reopened for business. High schools and universities reopened on May 7; grade schools and daycare reopened May 11.

Public Awareness

¶3. Montiel explained that public education was a crucial element to combating the H1N1 flu. Rumors of a high number of deaths and a high fatality rate were rampant in the Monterrey metropolitan area. The state began as early as April 26 an organized campaign to promote public and personal hygiene through TV and radio commercials, information booths in public areas and seminars to public employees such as teachers, nurses and police officers. The outreach also emphasized that the H1N1 flu was fully treatable if caught in time.

Current Capacity

¶4. There are now five testing machines capable of analyzing flu virus samples - two testing machines are owned by the Department of Health, and the Autonomous University of Nuevo Leon, the University of Monterrey, and Monterrey Tec's San Jose Hospital each have one machine. Each of the five testing machines is capable of testing 330 samples per day. Previously the state did not have any testing equipment. Reports of a young woman's death from the H1N1 flu in the Monterrey area on April 25 caused widespread fear in the state. The woman's death was later found not to have been caused by the H1N1 flu but it took eight days to receive the test results. At the peak of the outbreak, there were 310 unconfirmed cases of H1N1 flu in the state.

¶5. Monterrey now has three hospitals with wards dedicated to quarantine patients suspected of having flu like symptoms in order to help prevent further contamination. The hospitals are the Infant Hospital, Hospital Metropolitano and the Clinica 2 del IMSS. For the treatment of future flu outbreaks, the state has 12,000 doses of Tamiflu available.

Advisory Council

¶6. The Emergency Committee for the Prevention and Treatment of
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Viral Epidemics which was vital in the decision making process for the state government was made up of medical experts from various hospitals, state and local government agencies, local universities and a representative from the University of Texas' Institute of Molecular Medicine, Dr. Thomas Caskey. Access to the University of Texas is noteworthy since it is a direct resource most Mexican states do not have available and was made possible by the border relationships between Texas and Nuevo Leon. On May 11, the governor reconstituted the emergency committee into a permanent scientific advisory board including a permanent seat for the University of Texas.

¶7. Comments. As a result of H1N1 flu Nuevo Leon is better prepared to handle future outbreaks. The state did not have testing facilities or a scientific advisory council prior to the outbreak. Nuevo Leon has also taken the initiative of working in directly with the University of Texas which has access to more equipment and epidemiologists than the state can provide. Going forward however, Nuevo Leon does not yet have an action plan for how to handle the expected return of the H1N1 virus during the normal flu season. Montiel commented that it was still too early to create an action plan and will wait to see what happens during the summer months. End Comments.
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